CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method to enable a user to preview a document, said method comprising:

(a) providing a user interface;

(b) inputting, via the user interface, information specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including at least two of: a printed page, a tab page, a blank page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(c) obtaining digital images of at least some of the components specified by the information input in step (b);

(d) generating an image of the document by combining the digital images of at least some of the components in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in step (b); and

(e) causing the image of the document to be displayed.

2. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the information input in step (b) specifies a printed page, includes a reference to a source file containing content to be printed on the printed page, and also includes a media type specification for the printed page.

3. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the information input in step (b) specifies a binding type, and wherein said method further comprises:

(e) estimating document thickness based on the information input in step (b); and

(f) selecting a binding based on the binding type specified and based on the document thickness.

4. A method according to Claim 1, wherein an object is stored for each component, and wherein each object specifies a digital image, as well as other attributes, of its corresponding component.

5. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the image is generated in step (d) based upon stored relative position information and stored overlap information associated with the components.

6. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising steps of verifying whether it is possible to create a document specified by the information input in step (b) and outputting an error message if it is not possible.

7. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising a step of responding to a user command selecting a different portion of the document by obtaining and displaying a new image which simulates an appearance of said different portion of the document.

8. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising a step of responding to an edit command after the document has been displayed, by allowing a user to modify at least some of the information input in step (b).

9. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising a step of responding to a command to submit an order for the document by transmitting the information input in step (b) to a processing facility.

10. A method according to Claim 9, wherein the information is transmitted via an internet connection.

11. A method to enable a user to preview a document, said method comprising:

(a) providing a user interface;

(b) inputting information, via the user interface, specifying a source file which contains content for the document;

(c) inputting information, via the user interface, specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including pages to be printed and at least one of: a tab page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(d) inputting information, via the user interface, defining the pages to be printed, including information specifying content from the source file to be printed on said pages; and

(e) generating and displaying an image of the document by combining digital images of at least some of the components, in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in steps (c) and (d).

12. A method according to Claim 11, further comprising:

(e) in response to a user command selecting a different portion of the document, obtaining and displaying a new image which simulates an appearance of said different portion of the document.

13. A method according to Claim 11, wherein the information input in step (d) also includes a media type specification for the printed pages.

14. A method according to Claim 13, wherein a digital image of a page to be printed is generated by combining image data for the content specified in the information input in step (d) with image data for the media type specified.

15. A method according to Claim 11, wherein the information input in step (c) specifies a tab page and also specifies text to be included on a tab located on the tab page.

16. A method according to Claim 11, wherein the information input in step (c) specifies a front cover and also specifies a media type for the front cover.

17. A method according to Claim 11, wherein an object is stored for each component, and wherein each object specifies a digital image, as well as other attributes, of its corresponding component.

18. A method according to Claim 11, wherein the image is generated in step (e) based upon stored relative position information associated with the components.

19. A method according to Claim 11, further comprising steps of verifying whether it is possible to create a document specified by the information input in steps (c) and (d) and then outputting an error message if it is not possible.

20. A method according to Claim 11, further comprising a step of responding to an edit command after the document has been displayed, by allowing a user to modify at least some of the information input in steps (b)-(d).

21. A method according to Claim 20, further comprising a step of generating and displaying a new image of the document based on the modified information.

22. A method according to Claim 11, further comprising a step of responding to a command to submit an order for the document by transmitting the information input in steps (c) and (d), together with the source file, to a processing facility.

23. A method according to Claim 22, wherein the information is transmitted via an internet connection.

24. Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer readable medium, said process steps to enable a user to preview a document, said process steps comprising steps to:

(a) provide a user interface;

(b) input, via the user interface, information specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including at least two of: a printed page, a tab page, a blank page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(c) obtain digital images of at least some of the components specified by the information input in step (b);

(d) generate an image of the document by combining the digital images of at least some of the components in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in step (b); and

(e) cause the image of the document to be displayed.

25. Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer readable medium, said process steps to enable a user to preview a document, said process steps comprising steps to:

(a) provide a user interface;

(b) input information, via the user interface, specifying a source file which contains content for the document;

(c) input information, via the user interface, specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including pages to be printed and at least one of: a tab page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(d) input information, via the user interface, defining the pages to be printed, including information specifying content from the source file to be printed on said pages; and

(e) generate and display an image of the document by combining digital images of at least some of the components, in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in steps (c) and (d).

26. An apparatus to enable a user to preview a document, comprising:

a processor for executing stored program instruction steps; and

a memory connected to the processor for storing the program instruction steps,

wherein the program instruction steps include steps to:

(a) provide a user interface;

(b) input, via the user interface, information specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including at least two of: a printed page, a tab page, a blank page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(c) obtain digital images of at least some of the components specified by the information input in step (b);

(d) generate an image of the document by combining the digital images of at least some of the components in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in step (b); and

(e) cause the image of the document to be displayed.

27. An apparatus to enable a user to preview a document, comprising:

a processor for executing stored program instruction steps; and

a memory connected to the processor for storing the program instruction steps,

wherein the program instruction steps include steps to:

(a) provide a user interface;

(b) input information, via the user interface, specifying a source file which contains content for the document;

(c) input information, via the user interface, specifying an arrangement of components to create the document, the components including pages to be printed and at least one of: a tab page, a front cover, a back cover, and a binding;

(d) input information, via the user interface, defining the pages to be printed, including information specifying content from the source file to be printed on said pages; and

(e) generate and display an image of the document by combining digital images of at least some of the components, in a manner so as to simulate an appearance of the document were the document to be physically assembled according to the information input in steps (c) and (d).